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ABSTRACT

The Portland (Oregon) School District defines a school leaver as any student who is registered during the school year, leaves school, does not enter another school in the district that year, and for whom no request for transfer or withdrawal is entered. The district offers an array of programs that address the problem of school leavers. At the organizational level, high schools with extremely low enrollment or high leaver rates have been closed and their students assigned to other schools. In the area of student placement, the district operates a variety of educational alternatives, scheduling options, and other opportunities designed to meet students' needs. In addition, student performance is monitored and various intervention activities are employed to prevent and recover school leavers. Efforts taken in Portland to reduce the problem of school leavers are consistent with the school system's mission to help every child to reach his or her full potential. The comprehensive high school is the primary vehicle for acheiving this mission. (GC)

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Summary Paper
School Leaver Prevention and Recovery
Portland (Oregon) Public School District

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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SUMMARY PAPER

SCHOOL LEAVER PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

PORTLAND (OREGON) PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Superintendent

Prepared for: U.S. Department of Education, Urban Superintendents Network meeting, May 22, 1986

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I. DEFINITION

The Portland (Oregon) School District defines a "school leaver" as any student who is registered in school at any time during the school year (September through June), leaves school, does not enter any school in the district for the remainder of that school year, and for whom no request for transfer or withdrawal from school is entered. School leaver rates are calculated using this definition. Thus, our leaver rates include students who may enter other school districts, but for whom we receive no request for transfer; students who may return to school in a subsequent school year; and other students not generally recognized as "dropouts." On the other hand, students who "dropout" during the summer are not included in our rates. Therefore, a four-year accumulative leaver rate cannot be calculated from our annual leaver rate, and we do not otherwise attempt to calculate an accumulative rate.

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II. DATA

The table below shows annual school leaver rates calculated by the method described above.

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL LEAVER RATE BY HIGH SCHOOL AND YEAR

School	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Adams	12.8%	16.1%	16.9%	21.3%		- Closed -		
Benson	3.2%	2.9%	1.9%	1.0%	1.4%	0.7%	0.1%	0.8%
Cleveland	14.6%	12.8%	9.6%	9.0%	5.9%	4.8%	5.3%	9.2%
Franklin	14.5%	13.1%	11.1%	9.8%	11.4%	9.6%	8.6%	10.2%
Grant	5.4%	8.5%	7.7%	10.5%	4.5%	5.0%	8.2%	5.6%
Jackson	6.3%	6.4%	4.3%	5.2%	5.5%	- Closed -		
Jefferson	9.7%	11.2%	11.3%	8.2%	10.1%	7.5%	7.4%	7.5%
Lincoln	4.2%	7.0%	6.5%	4.4%	4.4%	5.9%	4.3%	4.0%
Madison	9.6%	10.3%	8.1%	7.1%	7.2%	9.8%	8.8%	11.8%
Marshall	5.1%	7.0%	6.7%	7.5%	10.5%	6.5%	12.2%	6.3%
Roosevelt	10.1%	8.0%	10.9%	11.4%	13.3%	17.5%	20.0%	16.6%
Wash/Monroe	19.6%	16.6%	19.1%	12.8%		- Closed -		
Wilson	3.9%	4.2%	4.7%	2.7%	3.6%	3.6%	3.9%	3.7%
Mean	8.4%	9.6%	9.1%	9.0%	7.1%	6.9%	7.5%	7.2%

III. PROGRAMS

The Portland School District has an extensive array of programs addressing the school leaver problem. These programs are best understood within the context of the following categories: Organization, Placement, Monitoring, and Intervention.

Organization

For the past fifteen years, this district has been reorganizing in the direction of providing K-5 or PK-5 grade elementary schools with an ideally appropriate enrollment of approximately 300 students. These elementary schools "feed into" local 6-8 grade middle schools with an ideally appropriate enrollment of approximately 600 students. These middle schools are in turn clustered and feed into 9-12 grade high schools with an ideally appropriate enrollment of approximately 1600 students. We have found that we are able to best provide comprehensive programs which address all students' needs by starting from this organizational basis. The one action which the Portland School District undertook which had, by far, the most significant impact on reducing the school leaver rate was the closure of high schools with extremely low enrollment and also extremely high leaver rates, and the assignment of their students to increase the enrollment at the remaining high schools. (See Sexton, "Trying to Make It Real Compared to What? Implications of High School Dropout Statistics." Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, Summer, 1985.)

Placement

At each stage of a student's academic career, the student, the student's parents, and appropriate school personnel review the student's progress in school, goals, and expected outcomes, and district offerings, to determine the most appropriate placement of the student. In conjunction with the local elementary, middle, and high school programs, the district offers a variety of options to meet individual student needs. These options include in-school opportunities, such as special education programs, alternative programs, and specialized elective courses; in-district opportunities, such as magnet programs, transfer programs, night programs, and alternative schools; and external opportunities offered through a variety of community organizations.

Monitoring

The district monitors student performance at the district, school, and classroom levels.

. District Monitoring
  - The Office of Management Information Services monitors computerized records of high school class attendance, grades, and credits earned to identify potentially "at risk" students.
  - Portland's Project Return identifies students picked-up off the street and returned to school.
  - Civic and community agencies serve Portland youth and work with district offices to identify students for both leaver prevention and recovery activities.
. School Monitoring
  - Schools monitor attendance, grades, and credits earned to identify students who may require additional attention.
. Classroom Monitoring
  - Teachers monitor student performance to determine where attention needs to be focused.

Intervention

A number of intervention activities are undertaken at Portland Public Schools to prevent and recover school leavers.

. Comprehensive high school services, as described below.
. Specific school-based activities for "at risk" minority youth, such as the American Indian Discussion Group at Roosevelt High School.
. Specific community based activities for "at risk" youth, such as the Hispanic Network coordinated by the Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, and programs offered through the Urban League of Portland.
. Cooperative school-community programs, such as Project STEP.

During the 1985-86 school year, several hundred Portland citizens, educators, businesspersons, professionals, and civic leaders undertook a major study with the goal to describe a comprehensive system for at-risk

high school age youth to deliver (a) academic achievement, b) attendance in school, (c) employability skills, and (d) effective transition from school to work. The study was spearheaded by the Portland Leaders' Roundtable and funded by a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The study produced major recommendations for making a conscious connection between education and work for all students. Specific system changes were recommended to increase the ability of the school system to meet the needs of at-risk youths. (See Ingredients of a Comprehensive System for At-Risk Youth, City of Portland, 4/16/86.)

IV. THE MISSION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN PORTLAND

The Portland School System exists to help every child entrusted to its care develop and realize his or her fullest academic, vocational, social, and personal learning potential and aspirations. The district seeks to provide learning opportunities in ways responsive to the uniqueness of each individual student, with the hope that each will lead a productive life, contribute to society, and have a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong endeavor. Moreover, we take special care that learning proceeds with equal opportunity for students of all cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds.

Within the Portland Schools, the comprehensive high school is the primary system for achieving the mission of secondary education. It is the role of the comprehensive high school to carry out the following functions.

1. Provide a broad range of course offerings

Courses shall be consistent with and complementing graduation requirements for both standard and modified diplomas. Courses which meet high school graduation requirements and elective courses shall be offered. Elective courses shall be offered to complement and supplement general, vocational, special education, and college preparatory education. The courses shall provide for a wide range of student interests and needs.

2. Provide a variety of approaches by which students can achieve credit toward graduation

High school shall provide various means for students to earn credit, including course completion, off-campus credit, credit by examination, advanced credit in eighth grade, summer school credit, and cooperative enrollment. Alternative programs will be provided to serve students whose educational needs are not met in a traditional setting.

3. Provide positive enrichment in course content

Courses offered at the comprehensive high school shall have a positive, enriching orientation, stressing such factors as human worth, multicultural and multiethnic appreciation, career and vocational awareness, and aesthetic experiences.

4. Provide a positive educational environment for students

The environment of the school shall be aimed at promotion of positive behaviors and attitudes; at the removal of racial and sexual prejudices; at prevention of drug abuse, juvenile crime and delinquency; at the promotion of good nutrition and healthful living patterns; and at the development of health, fitness, and emotional stability.

5. Provide guidance and counseling services for students

Provide each student counseling support for academic issues, career or vocational planning, personal concerns, and referral services.

6. Provide additional support services for students as needed

Additional support services, such as remedial support, English as a Second Language programs and Talented and Gifted programs, are

needed for certain students and shall be provided at the schools. For some students, special education is to be provided to ensure the opportunity, regardless of handicapping condition or special needs, to achieve maximum potential. Special education services may range from consultation to itinerant services to special class placement.

7. Provide for interschool and intramural activities

A broad range of activities including physical fitness for all students shall be provided to both male and female students at each comprehensive high school.

8. Provide opportunities for students to interact with representatives of various community resources, groups, and agencies

The school shall provide opportunities for students to work with various community groups, and shall provide for partnerships between high schools, employers, businesses, and schools and universities.

9. Provide a means of communicating with parents, patrons, and the community; of adapting to changes in the community and in society; and of remaining a functional social agency

District and school staff at each Portland high school shall work with the school's various publics in a continuous process of communication and renewal.

10. Provide a means of determining and improving the effectiveness of high school programs

Each school shall have a system of regular review of student outcome measures, program goals, and school practices. The system shall be used to determine program effectiveness and to continuously improve the performance of the school in achieving its mission.